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INTEGRATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SHERYL SANDBERG'S LEAN IN

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses integration of gender equality in Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In. It explores aspects of gender equality at workplace, women dealing with prejudices, bias and stereotypes about job related emotional behavior. This theme is exemplified in Lean In, which deals with rupturing the apparent barriers that prevent women from reaching the top of the corporate hierarchy. This book focuses on Sheryl Sandberg's personal experiences to encourage and provide mentorship to many women to collectively renovate the idea of what's possible in the lives of women. However, few critics see Sandberg as "capitalist supremacist patriarchal corporate world Sandberg". Her book is criticized for encouraging competition over cooperation. Against this backdrop, the paper will examine her critics and her own state of affairs in boosting the morale of women. More importantly, how far has she been able to shape women or snap women and look forward to new future and new possibilities is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Sheryl Sandberg; Gender equality; Stereotypes; Prejudices

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INTRODUCTION

There is a rapid transformation in society wherein women are now routinely performing roles once held by men and men too have started recognizing their roles and values in sustainable development of society. There is rising contribution of women in corporate sector however this upward shift is bleak in corporate top position. This movement of rise of corporate feminization can be seen by rising number of female occupying one-fourth workforce in corporate sector. This is a positive social shift, a movement from hard, cold, intensively masculinist institutions in the direction of a society that under the impact of feminism is coming out of the traditionally ghettoized "stay home" responsibility. A loud word of thanks is attributed to women mentors. Undoubtedly, Sheryl Sandberg's thought provoking book *Lean In* has tuned in the cultural trigger and elucidates the stagnancy of gender equity in the workplace, particularly in positions of power. It's an attempt to rupture the "glass ceiling", the apparent barriers that prevent women from reaching the top of the corporate hierarchy. The Statistics reveals poor state of women in organizational upper atmosphere; the higher the post, the less likely the women will fill it. Keeping these things into perspective and mixing it with personal anecdotes, Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* provides mentorship to many women collectively renovate the idea of what's possible in the lives of women. As she quotes:

"This book makes the case for leaning in, for being ambitious in any pursuit. And while I believe that increasing the number of women in positions of power is a necessary element of true equality, I do not believe that there is one definition of success or happiness" (10).

In the book *Lean In*, she tells stories about her experience bringing up gender in the workplace, to speak out to hundreds of women, listening to their stories, sharing her own with defensiveness and backlash. The first

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chapter "The Leadership Ambition Gap: What Would You Do if You Weren't Afraid?" lays out some of the complex challenges that women face. Each subsequent chapter focuses on an adjustment or differences that women can make themselves: increasing our self-confidence (Chapter Two "Sit at the Table"), getting our partners to do more at home (Chapter Eight "Make Your Partner a Real Partner"), not holding ourselves to unattainable standards (Chapter Nine "The Myth of Doing It All"). Altogether eleven chapters are synchronized to galvanize a feminist manifesto of which she herself concedes "I do not pretend to have perfect solutions to these deep and complicated issues" (9). She conforms that "Success and likeability go hand-in-hand for men; if a woman is successful, both men and women like her less." A study by psychologists like Peter Glick (Lawrence University) and Anny Cuddy (Harvard University) has time and again found that women face different social penalties, for doing the very things that lead to success. The women who is appreciated for delivering outcomes at work are then ridiculed for being "too aggressive", "insufficiently feminine", "too masculine", "out for herself', and "difficult". However, scientific research also tells us that both male and female leaders are liked equally when they allow more participation and involvement of subordinates in decision making but when acting authoritatively, female leader is more disliked than men. It seems females are being penalized for violating gender stereotypes. "Lean In" serves as a kind of philosophical and practical toolkit for women with ambitions of all kinds and an education and inspiration for men who are aware that their workplaces and home lives are diminished when women are only a fraction of who they can be. Sandberg describes writing this book as her own act of leaning in moving out of her professional comfort zone.

WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Lean In runs through two lines of argument. One talk about how society has changed through multiple generations of women and the other has to do with how society views women- and how that affects the way women view themselves. Women are going an extra mile and venturing into the fields such as aviation, petroleum industry, finance, etc. The merging of women in such fields ought to bring synergy into the system. It is noted that mentoring plays an instrumental role. It has helped them in achieving success in nontraditional workplaces which were earlier considered to be the domain of men. It is also observed that when women advance to the higher ranks, they transform the organization by instituting more egalitarian practices, such as open communication and advancement that is based on merit as opposed to patriarchal privilege. Sheryl Sandberg quotes:

"I am also acutely aware that the vast majority of women are struggling to make ends meet and take care of their families. Parts of this book will be most relevant to women fortunate enough to have choices about how much and when and where to work; other parts apply to situations that women face in every workplace, within every community, and in every home. If we can succeed in adding more female voices at the highest levels, we will expand opportunities and extend fair treatment to all." (9)

WOMEN MENTORING

Mentoring relationship can be crucial for women in their achievement of career advancement, recognition and improved job performance (Ragins & Cotton 1993). Women in the academy and business are underrepresented in senior positions and are promoted and tenured more slowly than men. Apart from this, women report feeling marginalized, experiencing subtle bias, pay inequity, and lack of family friend policies, and an educational and corporate culture that is not welcoming to women. Also women's career pattern differs that from men as women are likely to include parenting and family issues integral to their career decisions. However, Sheryl Sandberg presents a viable feminist model of mentoring

emphasizing on sharing power, collaboration, mutuality and commitment to diversity within a multicultural framework and holding the core values. She suggests that many junior women hesitate to be mentored by senior men. This evasiveness must end. Personal connections leverage promotions and completion of tasks. So it needs to be okay for men and women to spend informal time together in the same way the man can. Edson (1995) pointed that although family support is important for women to be able to gain the time and the approval of those immediately impacted by a decision to work longer hours, professional mentoring is vital to gain the knowledge and political information necessary for a woman to position herself as a viable top-level candidate. Ragins (1989) argues that, mentoring is essential for women, because women are often exclude from the networks through which individuals can gain career advancement. Finally, Sheryl Sandberg holds the opinion that good mentoring is a win-win situation for both the mentor and the mentee. Good mentors derive pleasure and delight from the challenge and fun in seeing the mentee traverse the road to deep understanding and more success. The mentor also develops skills in teaching, guiding, advising, networking and role modeling.

WOMEN AND GENDER ROLES

Gladys L Simon's (1943) views gender roles imposed on men and women affect their careers. Women are subsequently called upon to situate themselves with respect to men. The masculine stereotyping of male managers and entrepreneurs constantly silences the inherent capability of women to move forward. Women's potential has not been tapped to its optimum in corporate sector. The traditional female role of marriage, submissiveness and dependency creates a roadblock to their career. Marriage which brings stability and lessens the household burden on men ironically adds on house work and career dependency on the part of women. With the impending phase of motherhood, their focus shifts to family and profession takes a beating. Sandberg writes that a simple case study of replacing the name "Heidi" to "Howard" disapproves the nonexistence of gender stereotype. Although "Heidi" was having same set of skills yet she was seen as selfish and not the kind of person you would want to hire or work for. In order to truly start to correct these behaviors, Sandberg suggests women "to step further we need to communicate that these biases are undesirable and unacceptable."

In many instances, the women underestimate themselves and give rise to self inflicted obstruction to their career growth. This increases insecurity among them which lead to standing back foot and under rate their capacity. Sheryl Sandberg says "We lower our expectations of what we can achieve..... we compromise our career goals to make room for partners and children" (8). Also mistakes committed by female managers are viewed with magnifying glasses, labeled and criticized. Women managers are considered to be more susceptible to trial and error calls. It is because of this reason that many women readily accept a job of an assistant as a service role with little responsibility. In response to one of the critic regarding her choices for her children, she said "I want everyone to be able to choose, but I want us to be able to choose encumbered but gender choosing for us. I have a 7-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter. Success for me is that if my son chooses to be a stay-at-home parent, he is cheered on for that decision. And if my daughter chooses to work outside the home and she is cheered on and supported." This is a strong statement to validate her stand on what she believes. It suggests she's focused on the big picture on empowering women.

WOMEN AND GENDER STEREOTYPING

Women in management have to deal with prejudices, bias and stereotypes about job related emotional behavior. Sheryl Sandberg says "Our stereotype of men holds that they are providers, decisive and driven. Our stereotypes of women

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hold that they are caregivers, sensitive and communal." (40). A man's scolding to his subordinates is generally recognized and appreciated for his leadership and aggressive nature whereas women's burst is criticized. Her assertiveness is considered in contrast to her traditional image and hence is a sign of disrespect whereas men's behavior shows involvement. Even women don't negotiate as much as men but Sheryl believes that women can enter these negotiations with the knowledge that showing concern for the common good, even as they negotiate for themselves, will strengthen their position. She quotes on gender stereotyping:

"The gender stereotyping wars need an immediate and lasting peace. True equality will only be achieved when we all fight the stereotypes that hold us back. Feeling threatened by others' choices pulls us all down. Instead, we should funnel our energy into breaking this cycle." (169)

WOMEN IN PERSONAL LIFE

The eighth chapter of Sandberg's book *Lean In* deals with the role that Goldberg played in her life. Her memoirs repeatedly forecast the need and importance of sharing equal responsibility in any partnership. She emphasizes the support required both at personal and professional front. Sandberg fell in love with Dave Goldberg and married in 2004. She struggled a lot during her pregnancy and the birth of her first child in 2005. It's at this stage that she saw many women dropping out of workforce, but she decided to lean in. Dave's death was a great personal loss to her. Few days after his death she wrote on face book page "Dave was my rock. When I got upset, he stayed calm. When I was worried, he said it would be OK. When I wasn't sure what to do, he figured it out."

Janelle Nanos (2015) writes that Sheryl Sandberg has shared her personal experiences in the corner office with legions of women, pushing them to fully engage in their careers instead of backing away slowly as the thought of families creeps into their minds. She feels as this is something which is going to befall on us. As long as women do more of housework and childcare, women will disproportionately hurt both at workplace expectations and parenting expectations. Overworking can be downright dangerous. In reply Sandberg says, "We need to strike a chord and keep the balance." In the chapter "Seek and Speak Your Truth" she expresses people to be open and honest in their approach as it sends a "powerful signal to others" (86). She adds that humor can be used as an amazing tool to convey your message in goodnatured way. She was able to answer a question asked in a humorous manner by a colleague at Google, "Why do you hate me?" She asked why he would make that joke, which gave him a chance to explain in a way she was able to hear. She reiterates that although crying at work is not appreciated yet there are occasions when you can't stop yourself and you need to seek the truth. In such situations sharing emotions develop understanding and strengthen your relationships and commitment to your work. She advocates that "Maybe someday shedding tears in the workplace will no longer be viewed as embarrassing or weak, but as simple display of authentic emotion" (91).

LEAN IN CRITICISM

Some critics see Sandberg as "capitalist supremacist patriarchal corporate world Sandberg". Her book encourages competition over cooperation. According to Kate Losse (2013), Sandberg encourages women to maintain a commitment to the workplace without encouraging the workplace to maintain a commitment to them. It is as though Sandberg believes to create a parallel powerful stream of elite women, strong enough to silence male dominators. Many questions like how to change and challenge the patriarchal thinking is left unanswered. Her arguments about women expressing feminism are so glittering that it bypasses the reader to underscore some of the important questions. Another accusation on her is that she is

a powerful mentor figure for fiscally conservative white female elites. The gender equality proposition she evokes is basically for "white women only". Amy Alkon (2014) criticizes that putting out a book of business advices that contains hundreds of pages of largely imaginary notions about human psychology is mainly helpful for book sales, not for women who are snapping it up.

CONCLUSIONS

Most people would agree that gender bias exists but no one is doing anything about it. Women need not be swayed by such superficial and unenlightened opinions. The preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity influence their interaction with colleagues at workplace. She says, "As women we need to be aware of these biases and make an effort to create more equal environment for better performance for our organizations, but quite likely greater happiness for all." To solve these problems she has suggested doing three things "sit at the table", "make sure your partner is a real partner", and "don't leave before you leave".

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